



*Voices Today:**
History in the Making

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Rotarian Rick and Elin Lawrence



In 2006, while vacationing in Guatemala, I, Rick, was introduced to clean water projects that the Antigua, Rotary was involved in. What a good introduction to my learning about water projects which my Rotary back home in Connecticut was beginning to get interested in. Clean

water was then and is still now a primary interest in Rotary, International, and through my Guatemalan vacation, I was soon able to facilitate my local Rotary's involvement in Guatemala.

The Antigua Rotary put me in contact with Behrhorst Partners for Development (now ABPD in Guatemala), an NGO that had been providing services to the indigenous Mayans since 1967 with a stellar track record. ABPD responded promptly to my request to partner with enthusiasm. ABPD identified a village that desired to share in the development, prepared a budget and I began by making presentations to the six nearby Rotary clubs. Eventually, six more clubs joined in to raise a total of \$24,000 for the first village, Cojomachaj.

Since then, over the past 13 years I have made nearly 250 presentations to Rotary clubs throughout Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Oregon, Florida and Montreal, Canada. Recently, two clubs in the state of Washington have contributed, also a club in Fishers, Indiana as well as one in Twins Falls, Idaho.

Last Rotary Year (2019-2020) 48 clubs participated from 10 Districts in the funding of two Global Grants to raise \$224,070 for the villages of Chajalajya, Simajulehu & Xetonox which were completed. Elin and I visited in early 2020 for two days of celebration and dedication. In May, 2021, another Global Grant for the village of Xetonox, Comalapa in the amount of \$120,860 was approved by The Rotary Foundation and contributions are being sought to fund this Global Grant.

Having been a Rotarian since 1978, no project or activity in which I have participated had such a profound effect on my life until Elin and I visited the first village funded - Cojomachaj in 2007. As the saying goes, it was a "life changing event." The eye-opening, gratitude-filled, heart-felt aura of appreciation and love for mankind expressed by those villagers was overwhelming. Words just cannot describe what we felt from the hearts and saw in the eyes of those villagers who had so little and felt so blessed because they had running water and sanitation facilities, thanks in great part to the donation of many Rotarians. Rotary's goal of providing safe drinking water for the world will soon overshadow Polio Plus as that dreaded disease is finally eradicated. My inspiration and drive to continue that mission was solidified by that first visit and continued during each of the succeeding eleven visits we have made to Guatemala.

As we prepared to visit the first village, Cojomachaj, my wife, Elin, contacted the ABPD staff to determine if we could bring with us something besides a dedicatory plaque. She was informed the schools have few supplies and that should be considered. As a former elementary school teacher, Elin knew the value of the supplies as we filled our suitcases with donated pencils, crayons, notebooks, scissors, maps, flash cards, etc. We also brought soccer, playground and basketballs. My continued involvement and promotion of these projects would not be possible without the support, advice and companionship provided by Elin.

Although not a Rotarian, she has attended nearly every presentation, traveled to Guatemala yearly and has been an inspiration as it was her idea to bring school supplies to each village, thus making these a true humanitarian gesture. Elin was honored with the "Women of Influence" award during the 50th Reunion for the Russell Sage College Class of 1969. The award recognized her countless years of volunteer services to numerous organizations, including ABPD.